



AOT in Action

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from Director Sherry Henry:

Good afternoon,

We have some great news to share today! Arizona's Centennial License Plate was recognized as the best new license plate in the United States! The Centennial plate topped nine other entries to receive the honor. This is the second time an Arizona plate has been honored. Congratulations to the Arizona Centennial Commission for the recognition of their incredible work on this project. More information can be found below in the ***AOT News*** section.

In other great news, the Cactus League announced that the 2012 Cactus League spring training season set the all-time record for overall league attendance with 1,712,042 attendees! This represents a 7.3% increase over last year's figures. In addition to gaining insight into the attendance numbers, AOT is collaborating with the Cactus League on an economic impact survey. This information will be made available within the coming months. The survey will show us how much and where spring training fans spent their money while in Arizona. More information is located in the ***Industry News*** section below.

Have a great week!

Sherry Henry
Director, Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News

Arizona Wins America's Best License Plate Award

The Automobile License Plate Collectors Association (ALPCA, Inc.) has overwhelmingly voted that Arizona has the best new license plate in the United States. Last year, Arizona introduced a beautiful Centennial plate to honor the 100th anniversary of statehood in 2012. Since 1970, ALPCA recognizes a state with the best new license plate design of the year. This year marks the 41st anniversary of the award and the second award for Arizona after winning in 1996 for its general issue plate.

"The Centennial license plate commemorates an historic milestone for the State of Arizona. To see our emblem receive national recognition on the heels of our 100th anniversary is both an honor and a glowing source of pride for Arizonans," said Governor Jan Brewer. "I thank the Arizona Centennial Commission, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Safety for advocating and seeing to fruition this very special plate."

Since the Centennial Plate was introduced last fall, thousands of Arizona motorists have bought them. The popular specialty license plate was designed by P.S. Studios of Phoenix and required approval from the Arizona Department of Transportation and Arizona Department of Public Safety. >> [Read Full Article](#)

Save your Budget: AOT Announces New Marketing Cooperative Program!

In an effort to drive tourism to the rural regions of Arizona, AOT is proud to announce the FY13 Marketing Cooperative Program. This campaign will allow eligible DMOs, statewide tourism associations, tribal tourism entities and regional partnerships the opportunity to place advertising alongside AOT, and receive subsidized rates in a year-long campaign to respective regions. The media plan and application will be available for interested participants in early May. For further questions on the Marketing Cooperative, contact Glenn Schlottman, Community Relations Manager at 602-364-3727 or via email at gschlottman@azot.gov.

Last Chance to Register! Arizona-Mexico Commission Summit: Revitalizing the Arizona-Mexico Tourism Industry

Mexican visitors spend an average of \$7.3 million every day in Arizona's stores, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses. And tourism is a vital component to this economic activity. As a state, we must be prepared to face the challenges of this industry as well as recognize the growth opportunities that will attract more visitors who contribute to Arizona's economic vitality.

To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of this industry along with the opportunities for growth and development, the Arizona-Mexico Commission (AMC), in collaboration with Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT), Metropolitan Tucson Convention and Visitors Bureau (MTCVB), and The University of Arizona (UA) will be hosting a tourism summit: ***Revitalizing the Arizona-Mexico Tourism Industry***.

Join us for this dynamic event where key industry leaders from Arizona, Mexico and New York will present on the valuable information on this impactful industry.

You will hear from Mexico City tourism expert Miguel Torruco who will give us a futuristic look at international tourism and U.S. Consul Chad Cummins who will help us better understand the current U.S. State Department's advisory on travel to Mexico.

There will also be a roundtable panel of Arizona and Sonora tourism leaders from the public and private sector including Sherry Henry, director of the Arizona Office of Tourism; Lisa Urias, president/CEO at Urias Communications; Felipe Garcia, vice president of Community Affairs and Mexico Marketing for the MTCVB; and Javier Tapia, director of the Sonora Office of Tourism.

[REGISTER NOW!](#)

WHEN: 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m., Wednesday, April 11, 2012

WHERE: Lodge on the Desert, Tucson

For registration information, visit <http://azmc.org/meetings-and-events/event-registration.asp?eventId=28>.

AOT Now Accepting Nominations for the 2012 Governor's Tourism Awards!

The Arizona Office of Tourism and industry partners are busy coordinating plans for the 2012 Governor's Conference on Tourism, July 11-13, at the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix. The conference is the premier event for members of the travel industry to participate in dynamic work sessions and listen to informative guest speakers.

In addition to the conference, AOT coordinates the Governor's Tourism Awards, honoring individuals and organizations that have contributed noteworthy achievements over the past year to the betterment of the tourism industry. These award recipients are excellent examples of leadership, commitment and teamwork that make the Grand Canyon State a premier travel destination.

AOT invites you to review the 2012 award categories and guidelines and submit nominations of individuals or organizations that have made a significant contribution to the tourism industry. The winners will be awarded at the Governor's Tourism Awards Dinner Gala, co-hosted by AOT and the Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association on Thursday, July 12. All submissions must be received by **5:00 p.m.** on **April 26**. Registration information for the Governor's Conference on Tourism is available at <http://www.eventbrite.com/event/1505818945>.

Upcoming Events & Activities

[New York Media Mission](#)

Date: April 16 – 20

Location: New York City, NY

[US Travel Association's International Pow Wow](#)

Date: April 21 – 25
Location: Los Angeles, CA

Canyons, Canyons, Canyons Press Trip

Date: April 30 – May 5
Location: Grand Canyon, Flagstaff, Page and Sedona

Industry News

Join us for the New AZ Wine & Dine!

A new culinary event is being held at Scottsdale Quarter on April 12. The Arizona Lodging & Tourism Association, who co-hosted Forks & Corks for the past eight years, presents its first annual culinary showcase, AZ Wine & Dine. Guests will indulge in savory samplings from notable resort restaurants, as well as Scottsdale Quarter restaurants, while enjoying live music in a fun and festive atmosphere. Tastings from boutique wineries and microbreweries will be offered, as well as a silent auction featuring opportunities to purchase Arizona getaways and gift certificates, sports and music memorabilia, retail merchandise and more.

The event will be held on Thursday, April 12 from 5-8 p.m. at the Scottsdale Quarter (NE Corner of Scottsdale Road & Greenway). Tickets are only \$65 in advance or \$75 day of event. For more information or to purchase tickets, please visit www.AZWineandDine.com. This is a 21-and-over event.

2012 Cactus League Season Sets New All-Time Records, Star Players Draw Fans, Arizona Gets the Win

Arizona's Cactus League wrapped up another incredible month of baseball in the desert. Like most seasons, 2012 was another year for the record books. The 2012 Cactus League spring training season set the all-time record for overall league attendance with 1,712,042 attendees at 230 games (which included 3 games played in Tucson) representing a 7.3% increase over last year's figures. The league's average per game attendance also spiked to 7,444, an 8.7% increase in average attendees per game over the 2011 season.

The season highlights included the addition of Major League Baseball players such as Albert Pujols with the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim and pitcher Yu Darvish with Texas Rangers; an increase in the number of televised broadcasts of spring training games in home team markets; and most importantly, great weather.

In the first 17 consecutive days with 125 games played, attendance reached more than 940,000 fans. This was more than 200,000 fans in attendance over the same period last year. The Arizona Diamondbacks kept their title as "most watched team in the league" this year with an overall attendance of 186,828 fans. Like 2011, the teams stacked up in the same order with the Colorado Rockies reporting an overall attendance of 182,565 for the season and San Francisco Giants taking the third position with an overall attendance of 168,320. Chicago Cubs ranked fourth in 2012 with 153,281 in overall attendance. It was hard not to notice the marked increase in attendance for the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim. They soared into the fifth place position

with 130,126 in overall attendance, an increase of 47% in overall attendance which was sparked by the off-season acquisition of Pujols.

Within the league, 14 teams were up in per game attendance over last season. The Arizona Diamondbacks held the first position with a per game average attendance of 11,677; San Francisco Giants came in second with 10,520; and Colorado Rockies and Chicago Cubs came in third and fourth with 10,143 and 9,580 per game averages respectively.

Three of the 2012 season's games set single game attendance records in the league's top 20 games of all-time. The March 17, 2012 game between the San Francisco Giants and Los Angeles Dodgers at Camelback Ranch in Glendale drew 13,655 fans making it the most attended single game in the league's history. Coming in second was the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim game against the Los Angeles Dodgers, also held at Camelback Ranch, on March 18, 2012 drawing 13,648 fans. The March 16, 2012 game between the San Francisco Giants and Chicago Cubs at Hohokam Stadium in Mesa drew 13,245 fans ranking them in the 16th position for single game records. For more information visit www.CactusLeague.com.

Visa Study Says Travel Spending Returning to Pre-Recession Levels

Global travel spending is on the rise, building momentum toward pre-recession levels, according to Visa's 2011 Travel Snapshot. Travelers from the United States increased tourism spend on their Visa accounts by 7 percent, those from Canada by 11 percent, and Mexico by 19 percent. Most notably, travelers from Brazil increased international travel spend on their Visa accounts by 32 percent in 2011—43 percent of which was in the U.S.

Brazil and China proved to be significant corridors for travel to the United States. Visa account holders from Brazil increased spend on travel to the U.S. by 41 percent, from \$1.9 billion in 2010 to \$2.7 billion in 2011, edging out the U.K. as the second highest total contributor to U.S. tourism revenue. Visa account holders from China increased travel spend within the United States by 61 percent, from \$741 million in 2010 to \$942 million in 2011. Similarly, Visa account holders from the U.S. increased travel spend in China by 27 percent, from \$741 million in 2010 to \$941 million in 2011.

While Visa account holders from the United States (\$3.5 billion), France (\$351 million) and the United Kingdom (\$348 million) remained the top three contributors to Canadian tourism, Visa account holders from China had one of the most significant increases with a 41 percent increase year over year, from \$229 million in 2010 to \$321 million in 2011.

While the United States remains the top destination of choice for Visa account holders from Brazil, most European nations recognized double digit increases in travel spend by Brazilian Visa account holders in 2011. Spending by Brazilian Visa account holders increased by 30 percent in France, 44 percent in Italy and 41 percent in the United Kingdom. (*Travel Pulse, March 30*)

Company Releases Top Meeting Trends for 2012

Luxury travel is back, and meeting demand is the strongest it's been since 2008, says Benchmark Hospitality International after polling its 35 hotels, resorts and conference centers in the US.

They were among the "Top Ten Meeting Trends for 2012," the company says. "The trend is up for all industry segments from telecommunications, education and insurance to healthcare, energy and beyond," the company says. Bookings remain short-term but sales are becoming far more limited.

Other top trends:

- Meeting size is trending up. Properties are "electing to fill their properties with larger meetings at a higher rate," the report said. No vacancy signs are again being posted.
- Meeting space is also getting more creative with properties offering outdoor venues and meetings around bonfires and other creative alternatives.
- Technology has created a growing use of smart phones, iPads and mobile sites that start immediately with the registration process.
- Meeting packages are coming back strongly and planners are expecting price increases this year. "They are still looking for the best value, but pricing push-back is on the wane," the report says
- "Increasingly, the meeting destination is as important as the meeting venue," the report says.
- Socially responsible meetings are more popular than ever, ranging from support for Habitat for Humanity to help with a local soup kitchen. (*Travel Mole, April 3*)

DOT Reports 1.7 Percent Increase in U.S. Airline Passengers

The number of passengers on U.S. and foreign carriers serving the U.S. went up 1.7 percent in 2011 to 803.5 million scheduled passengers, according to the latest U.S. Department of Transportation figures. The 2011 passenger total was 4.3 percent higher than in 2009.

The number of passengers increased in every month of 2011 from 2010 except in October when a 1.3 percent decrease in domestic passengers resulted in a systemwide 0.7 percent decrease that was not fully offset by an increase in international passengers. Higher fuel prices led to airlines cutting back to fall/winter schedules earlier than usual. As a result, there were not as many domestic seats available in October as expected.

Delta Air Lines, following its merger with Northwest Airlines, carried more total system passengers in 2011 than any other U.S. airline for the second consecutive year. American Airlines carried more international passengers to and from the United States in 2011 than any other U.S. or foreign carrier, followed closely by Delta. (*Travel Pulse, April 3*)

IATA Data Shows February Improvement in Airline Passenger Demand

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) said that February 2012 showed an 8.6 percent improvement in passenger demand over February 2011. Several factors inflated February 2012 results and distorted comparisons with the year-ago period. These included weaker traffic during the Arab Spring a year ago and the occurrence of Carnival in Brazil in February, a month earlier than in 2011.

Cargo demand was also subject to positive distortion by the occurrence of Chinese New Year in January, which pushed some deliveries into February. When comparing to January 2012 levels,

the picture becomes much more moderate, with passenger demand growing by 0.4 percent and cargo demand declining by 1.2 percent.

Global passenger capacity expanded by 7.4 percent compared to previous-year levels, lagging behind the 8.6 percent increase in demand. This has had a positive impact on load factors, which airlines have maintained at 75.3 percent—better than the 74.4 percent recorded in February 2011.

“The outlook is fragile. Improvements in business confidence slowed in February,” said Tony Tyler, IATA’s director general and CEO. “Weak economic conditions and rising fuel costs are a double-whammy that an industry anticipating a 0.5 percent margin can ill afford.”

Asia-Pacific carriers saw a 5.9 percent increase in demand with a 6.2 percent increase in capacity. Load factors stood at 75.4 percent. European carriers saw a 7.6 percent increase in international demand, well ahead of the 5 percent increase in capacity. North American carriers showed the weakest growth in demand at 4.9 percent, which was still ahead of 4.3 percent growth in capacity over the previous year. The average load factor was the lowest among the major regions at 72.1 percent.

Middle East carriers posted 23.4 percent international growth, which is distorted by the poor performance in February 2011 owing to the impact of the Arab Spring. Capacity growth stood at 16.1 percent. Average load factors for the region showed the most dramatic improvement to 76.9 percent in February 2012 compared to 72.4 percent in the previous year. Stripping out the distortions, IATA estimates that the region has now fully recovered. African carriers also saw a positively distorted performance in February due to the Arab Spring with 24.7 percent growth in demand and 20.2 percent growth in capacity.

Latin American airlines posted a 13.3 percent increase in demand against a 10.8 percent increase in capacity. Load factors stood at 78.3 percent, the highest among the regions and well ahead of the 76.6 percent achieved for February 2011. (*Travel Pulse*, April 3)

U.S. Travel Urges Measured Response to GSA IG Report

In the wake of a General Services Administration (GSA) Inspector General’s (IG) report investigating an October 2010 conference, the U.S. Travel Association urged federal lawmakers today to carry out a measured and appropriate response to the findings of the report.

“The findings of the IG report clearly detail instances of inappropriate spending and poor decision making on the part of federal employees,” said Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “At a time when Washington is laser-focused on creating jobs and curbing wasteful spending, we hope policymakers will remember that responsible travel can help accomplish these goals. We know through repeated studies that travel for face-to-face meetings increases worker productivity in the private and public sectors. We also know that meetings, conferences and events are critical to our economy and support 845,000 U.S. jobs. We hope Congress and the Administration will consider these facts when deciding how to appropriately respond to the event from October 2010.”

The IG’s report comes at a time when the Obama Administration has already taken significant steps to strengthen federal travel regulations. In September 2011, the Office of Management

and Budget issued a memorandum to Executive Branch agencies requiring a comprehensive review of all conference spending policies. In November 2011, President Obama issued an Executive Order directing federal agencies to reduce government travel by adopting a "local first" policy for conferences and employee travel.

If properly followed, federal travel rules and regulations enforce competitive bidding, cost limitations on food, beverages and lodging, and a host of other restrictions that ensure limited spending while allowing productive government business to take place.

"The American people demand two things of their government: to be responsible stewards of their hard-earned tax dollars and to provide valuable services that benefit this country. Federal travel, when conducted responsibly, fulfills both of those promises," said Dow. "Unfortunately, a single instance of irresponsible decision making has the potential to cast a negative light on the millions of men and women who work every day to make America's meetings, conventions and events industry the best in the world. It is important to remember that this particular event was the result of a failure to follow federal travel regulations that were already in place to protect the misuse of taxpayer funds."

The U.S. Travel Association is the national, non-profit organization representing all components of the travel industry that generates \$1.9 trillion in economic output and supports 14.4 million jobs. U.S. Travel's mission is to increase travel to and within the United States. (*Travel Industry Wire, April 3*)

U.S. Travel Survey Finds Americans Still Tentative About Leisure Travel

The U.S. Travel Association and MMGY Global released their quarterly travelhorizons survey, which shows the share of U.S. adults taking a leisure trip edged up to 69 percent in February 2012 compared to 68 percent a year earlier. After two years of consecutive declines, survey officials say this is a positive sign that leisure travel is on the mend. The number of trips taken by leisure travelers in the past year remained relatively constant at four trips.

At the same time, a little more than half (56 percent) of U.S. adults plan on taking a leisure trip in the next six months, a figure that is lower than the 59 percent who said they would travel in February 2011, but the same as February 2010.

Meanwhile, the number of U.S. adults who took a business trip in the 12 months ending in February, after falling from 39 percent in February 2008 to 24 percent in February 2011, edged down to 22 percent in February 2012. More than 41 percent of those who traveled for business in the past year were general business or "transient" travelers, while 31 percent were traveling for conference or convention purposes.

According to the report, the fact that general business travel was a larger share of overall business travel than the prior three February surveys signals that general business travel appears to be recovering faster than meetings and conventions. Business travel intentions for the next six months remain essentially flat compared to a year earlier (15 percent versus 16 percent), indicating that economic growth in general will likely be moderate in the near term.

Meanwhile the Travel Sentiment Index, which provides current perceptions of travel among U.S. adults, rose to 93.6, the second-highest level since April 2007 (March 2007 = 100). Though still

below the level of 95.2 reached last February, the TSI was measurably higher in February compared to the prior three quarters, with the gain mainly driven improvements in the finances of travelers and the affordability of travel.

"Americans are continuing to travel but intentions remain somewhat restrained compared to pre-recessionary levels, which is not surprising given the uneven nature of the modest economic recovery to date," said David Huether, senior vice president of research for the U.S. Travel Association. "We are carefully monitoring the on-going surge in gas prices, which could erode travel perceptions about the affordability of travel as we edge closer to summer." (*Travel Pulse*, April 5)

National Park Service Announces Award of New Contract for "Grab and Go" Food Service and Bicycle Rental Operation

Grand Canyon National Park Superintendent David V. Uberuaga today announced the award of a concession contract for a "grab and go" food service and bicycle rental operations located at the Grand Canyon Visitor Center on the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park. The National Park Service underwent an open and competitive process soliciting applications for these services. After an extensive evaluation process, the National Park Service selected Bright Angel Bicycles, L.L.C. as the concessioner.

This concessions contract will be issued for a term of 10 years. The contract requires seasonal bicycle rentals, as well as guided daily bicycle tours conducted during the spring, summer and fall. The contract also requires year-round, "grab and go" food and beverage service targeted toward hikers, bikers and pedestrians in the Mather Point area of the park. Operations under this new contract are expected to begin in mid to late May of 2012.

Visitors utilizing the bicycle rental service will be able to ride on portions of the park's multi-use greenway trail system open to bicycles, on all park roads open to public vehicular traffic and on park roads open only to shuttle bus traffic, including the Hermit Road and the Yaki Point Road. Visitors can also make use of the park's shuttle bus system, which can accommodate up to three bicycles per bus.

Bright Angel Bicycles, L.L.C. will operate from a new 1,200 square foot bicycle rental / snack shop facility located in the Grand Canyon Visitor Center complex. The building is expected to be completed by May 1, 2012. Its design and materials are compatible with the other buildings in the complex and include a metal roof, stucco and stone masonry siding, with two covered patios on each end of the building for bicycle fitting and orientation, and outdoor cafe seating.

The addition of visitor bicycle rental operation and the construction of the facility on Grand Canyon's South Rim was envisioned by the park's 1995 General Management Plan and was included as part of the park's 2008 South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan. The National Park Service prepared an Environmental Assessment for the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan and a Finding of No Significant Impact was signed May 27, 2008. For more information on the plan please visit <http://www.nps.gov/grca/parkmgmt/trans.htm>.

For additional information on the award of this contract, please contact Doug Lentz, Grand Canyon National Park Chief of Concessions Management at (928)638-7709.

For questions or information regarding Bright Angel Bicycles, L.L.C. rental operation or food and beverage service at Grand Canyon National Park, including rates and reservations, please contact 928-814-8704 or visit their webpage at <http://bikegrandcanyon.com/>. For information on the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park please call (928) 638-7888 or log onto the park's Web site for the "South Rim Guide" at http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/directions_s_rim.htm.

Enjoy Grand Canyon's Earth Day Celebration during Fee-Free National Park Week

On Sunday, April 22, 2012, Grand Canyon National Park will celebrate the 42nd anniversary of Earth Day with demonstrations, games, information on local and national environmental initiatives, and much more. All Earth Day activities are free of charge and will take place at the Grand Canyon Visitor Center near Mather Point between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.

There will also be a special showing of the film *Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time* on Saturday, April 21 at 7:30 p.m. in the Grand Canyon Visitor Center theatre. This film explores the life and legacy of famed conservationist Aldo Leopold and the many ways in which his land ethic and philosophy shaped conservation and the modern environmental movement.

Visitors to the park during Earth Day weekend are encouraged to watch for restaurant specials, featuring local and/or sustainable ingredients. In addition, most retail outlets will be offering discounts on reusable water bottles to increase awareness about Grand Canyon's new water bottle filling stations and their "reduce, reuse, refill" initiative.

Grand Canyon's Earth Day festivities will kick off National Park Week in the park; and like national park units around the country, Grand Canyon will recognize National Park Week by waiving entrance fees April 21 – 29, 2012.

"America's national parks have something for everyone," said National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis. "...and since admission is free to all 397 parks, all week long, National Park Week is a great time to get up, get out, and explore a park."

Visitors who arrive at the Grand Canyon during National Park Week will be allowed to enter the park free of charge. Those who plan to spend time in the park beyond April 29 will need to pay the regular entrance fee for the remainder of their stay.

Park visitors are reminded that the fee-free designation applies to entrance fees only and does not affect fees for camping, reservations, tours or use of concessions. Park entrance stations will have Interagency Senior and Annual Passes available for those who wish to purchase them.

Grand Canyon National Park's 2012 Earth Day celebration is a collaborative effort between the National Park Service; Xanterra South Rim, L.L.C.; Grand Canyon Railway; Delaware North Companies; the City of Flagstaff; Northern Arizona University; Coconino National Forest; Flagstaff Area National Parks; Grand Canyon Trust; Arizona Lung Association; U.S. Soybean Board; Sierra Club; Clean Cities of Arizona; and the park's cooperating association and fundraising partner, Grand Canyon Association. All of these organizations will have representatives present at this year's event.

For additional information on Grand Canyon's Earth Day celebration, please contact Deirdre Hanners, Environmental Protection Specialist at 928-638-7627. To learn more about visiting Grand Canyon National Park, visit the park's web site at www.nps.gov/grca. And for more information on National Park Week, please visit www.nps.gov/npweek or www.nationalparkweek.org.

Calendar of Events

Visit www.ArizonaGuide.com to find information on all the exciting [events, festivals and activities](#) held throughout the Grand Canyon State!

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